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ARIOVISTUS AND WILLIAM II

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Civilization had its first contact with the Germans more than two thousand years ago, and against it they have warred ever since, seeking forcibly to dominate it, to direct its energies, and to restrict its development to their own uses and advantage. Their initial appearance in the history of Western Europe was made with a flourish of war trumpets somewhat more than a century before our era. At that time vast hordes of Teutons engaged in a general tribal movement toward the West. After about a decade of victorious wanderings, during which they had penetrated as far as Spain, they were crushed and well-nigh destroyed by the Roman commander Gaius Marius in 102 and 101 B.C. No descriptions of these tribes, however, or of any individuals among them have come down to us, beyond the fact that they were a military scourge.

The first German personage of whom we have any record was Ariovistus, a king who was reigning in 58 B.C., the momentous year when Julius Caesar entered Gaul on the career of victory that was definitely to determine the trend of occidental civilization.

There is no direct evidence that Ariovistus was a Hohenzollern! Caesar, however, who came into conflict with him, has given us in his *Commentaries*¹ abundant material for a character study of the first German war lord of history, which will show remarkable similarity of trait and outlook on the part of Ariovistus to the most conspicuous member of that fateful clan. William II regards himself as the incarnation and integration of the national character, and as the

¹ All material used in the present study is taken from Caesar's *Commentaries on the Gallic War*, and all references are to this work, by book and chapter. Tacitus and the illuminating works of the mediaeval writers, Peter of Dusburg, Lasicius, Dionysius Fabricius, and others, have not been quoted, as the object is to show, not the development of German character, but its persistence, in the main unchanged, from the beginnings of German History to the present day.

model and guide of his people toward the expression of that character. We accept him in that capacity. Ariovistus also expressed the racial character and is accepted by modern Germany as a representative German, if we may judge by numerous comments upon him contained in German editions of Caesar intended for use in German schools. Ariovistus expressed the race character as the chosen overlord of those who would choose as lord that man only who could sum up in himself, express, and give direction and effect to the instincts and characteristics which they possessed in common with him. He was content to be the chosen, or perhaps the self-imposed and subsequently accepted, overlord of the clans whom he directed to the carrying out of his and their common impulses and purposes. His notorious successor has advanced from this position, and acknowledges his election to supreme authority only at the hand of God himself. Really it is not such a far cry, as blood goes, from Ariovistus to the Hohenzollern. It is highly probable that Ariovistus was of the cruel and warlike Suebian stock. Caesar, in his account of his victory over the Germans, tells us that "there were two wives of Ariovistus, one a Suebian by nationality, whom he had brought with him from home" (i. 53), pointing definitely to Suebia as their joint home and not as hers only. And besides, no member of any other than the dominant clan could ever have established himself as "king"; and that the Germans themselves regarding the Suebi as the most powerful of their tribes we learn elsewhere, for a joint embassy from several German tribes declares to Caesar that "they yielded to the Suebi alone, whom not even the immortal gods could equal; but there was no one else on earth whom they were not able to conquer" (iv. 7). The Hohenzollerns also are a Swabian house, though the blood has been debased by the offscourings of the last days of imperial Rome, plus a taint of Balto-Slav and of Esthonian, the last a Mongol infusion. The "two wives" have been mentioned above, instead of economizing space by naming only the one in question, as throwing light on a certain suggestion emanating from the Hohenzollern, or at least countenanced by him, proposing plural marriage as a means of repopulation after the present war.

Now to our study of the man. Enter the protagonist: "Ariovistus, king of the Germans," ushered upon the stage of history by Gaius Julius Caesar (pronounced in Latin, *Kaisar*). The two names arrest the attention at once. Ariovistus, a proud title of overlordship; for what Caesar states as the name of the German king is really a Latinization of a primitive Germanic form of *Heer Fuerst*, "war lord," even as later Arminius is recognizable as Hermann camouflaged in an Italian disguise; and the successor and possible descendant of the German king, that "barbarous, hot-tempered, headstrong man," bears as his imperial title the name of Ariovistus' conqueror, become a world-symbol of military might. Furthermore, the title "King of the Germans" suggests at least that Ariovistus had succeeded, as did the grandfather of his successor, in welding together various tribes of Germanic stock into some sort of confederation; for, as the account of the battle shows (i. 51), Ariovistus was at that time the overlord of at least seven tribes, of which one, the Suebi, was powerful and important enough to be termed "nation" by Caesar (i. 53).

The three subjective traits of Ariovistus' character mentioned above—barbarity, irascibility, stubbornness—found their outward and objective expression in a relentless and gratuitous cruelty, not merely evidenced in his personal acts, but enjoined by him upon his willing agents. "They dreaded the cruelty of Ariovistus even when absent," says Diviciacus to Caesar, "just as if he were present in person" (i. 32); and by those whose ravaged towns fell into his sinister power, "all forms of cruelty had to be endured" (i. 32). Ariovistus tore from their homes and deported or dragged with him in his train the noble, the wealthy, the officials, of conquered peoples. He even carried off the children—and it is to be noted that "children," not "sons," is the word employed—of all the prominent men of the Gallic tribes over whom he had by force or craft extended his sway (i. 31). The torture and execution of these innocents as punishment for acts of their parents or of their countrymen, upon which acts he might lay his own whimsical construction of treason, or guilt, or disobedience, or *lèse majesté*, was his common practice: "Upon them he practiced every sort of

cruelty, if some trifling thing was not done according to his whim and desire" (i. 31). Prisoner and hostage alike were beyond compassion: "In their defeat they met with overwhelming disaster; they lost all their nobles, all their senate" (i. 31). He handed over to the cruelty of vassal tribes, as foreign to his stock as the Armenian is foreign to the Turk, conquered tribes in the vicinage of the vassals' dominions, to lord it over them in imitation and emulation of his own savagery: "They were compelled [by him] to give the noblest men of the state as hostages to the Sequanians" (i. 31).

Ariovistus' first foothold west of the Rhine was gained by craft and violence and by regarding an agreement as a "scrap of paper." It was a fine instance of peaceful penetration: "It chanced that the Germans were called in as mercenaries by the Sequanians. After these savage and barbarous men had become used to the lands and mode of living and the abundant resources of the Gauls, more were brought over" (i. 31); but the bargain was a sad one for the Sequanians. Victory with German aid was worse for a weak ally than defeat at the hands of a more chivalrous foe: "But worse happened to the victorious Sequanians than to the conquered Haeduans, because Ariovistus had settled down in their territories and had seized a third part of the Sequanian land, which was the best of all Gaul; and now he was demanding that the Sequanians vacate another third" (i. 31). Ariovistus' price for assisting the Sequanians on their own invitation and in their own land was the land itself. And why? Not that it was "nominated in the bond," but it was "the best in all Gaul"; and so Ariovistus coveted it and took it. The trifling fact that the land was another's weighed not at all with a character so cruelly selfish. With such men it is an openly proclaimed principle that *might is right*.

It is, by the way, a rather curious coincidence that this Sequanian land which the barbarous German so unscrupulously seized is today—Alsace. Even then its rich territory was a bait to barbarism.

It must have been in a thoughtless or *Kulturless* moment that Ariovistus apparently permitted self-expatriation—I suppose he called it self-determination—on the part of a subjugated or dispossessed tribe; even as, in after ages, the Alsatian victims of the

catastrophe of Sedan were accorded the very real privilege of forsaking the lands of their birth and of their love, and of seeking "another abode, other homes, remote from the Germans" (i. 31) in the narrowed boundaries of *La Belle France*. That such a migration was permitted is evident, for the spokesman of the Gauls declares to Caesar, "It will happen in a few years that we shall be driven from the boundaries of Gaul" (i. 31). Barbarous, hot-tempered, and headstrong as Ariovistus was, he was evidently guilty at times of extremely reprehensible weakness. Since those crude days there has been a steady development in *Kultur*. The modern plan would have been quite simple—merely to have transported east of the Rhine the most restless of the victims; that is, "those who were unable to endure his rule longer"! (i. 31). Strange that Ariovistus should have failed to perceive the advantages of enslaving the Gallic tribes and of utilizing them in forced development of the rudimentary agricultural labor of his semi-nomadic national economy, thus liberating for congenial military enterprises additional relays of warriors whose highly uncongenial task it had been to provide, in alternate years, sustenance for the troops actually in the field (iv. 1).

The army was the chief joy of Ariovistus and his satellite princelings; it was their pride of life. They avidly studied the science of death and devastation and applied it as an art. The blood lust was in their hearts and souls. Blood must flow, be it of men, preferably, or of beasts slain in wholesale battles. Sport and the sportsman's grant of a fighting chance were to them unknown. Their battlefields and their game coverts alike were shambles after battle or hunt: "All their life is devoted to hunting and to military activities" (vi. 21).

To such an extent had Ariovistus' savagery developed that to the slaughter of the neighboring tribes he added the ruthless devastation of their lands. Germany, an oasis of barbarism within a barren and empty desert ring, was his ideal and that of his heathen hosts. Bordering territory must never even be able to nourish a possible rival or an annoying neighbor. And in a nightmare of hate and fear of the rise of a rival, the harrying and despoiling of the lands just beyond his borders became a fixed principle of

conduct. We may readily imagine the fiendish joy of the Teuton horde in the cutting down of orchards, the burning of the standing crops, the poisoning of wells, the devouring blaze of cottage and of stable, the very ruin of the soil: "Tribally they consider it the highest praise that the land shall lie vacant as widely as possible from their borders" (iv. 3); and again, "It is the chief praise for a state that it shall have around it solitudes with wasted lands to as great a distance as possible" (vi. 22). Oh, ghastly science of devastation! Who would ever have dreamed that civilized men would again behold it reappear upon the earth?

This craze of Ariovistus and his wolfish hordes for destruction has a clear psychological explanation and an economic reflection. The basic motif was of course fear, however strenuously Ariovistus would have denied it and indeed have disbelieved it. Fear has ever been the active principle of tyranny, from earliest Mesopotamia down the long line, through Ariovistus, through Herod, slayer of infants, to the present. And fear breeds hate of the object feared. What savage shrilling of some primitive hymn of hate must have rent the flame-reddened sky as these unholy marauders plied spear and axe and torch in their frenzied orgies of ruin! And why should they fear? Why should any tyrant fear, be he savage or *soi-disant* civilized? Because his satanic soul knows and can know, imagines and can imagine, no being higher and nobler and cleaner of heart and hand than himself. Superior beings are not dreamed of in his philosophy.

So much for the Ariovistan psychology. The economic reflection of it was an economic isolation, and hence an enforced economic independence, thus establishing the tradition of Germany for the Germans which has persisted through the ages. To insure this economic independence the development of the national resources was promoted in a crude way. We have an early and interesting instance in the improvement of the inferior native strain of animals of burden and transport: "Indeed, the Germans do not use the imported pack animals in which the Gauls take delight and which they procure at high prices; but those which are bred among them, stunted and unsightly, they render by daily training capable of the most severe labor" (iv. 2). The entire economic outlook of

Ariovistus is along the line of expansion from within: the disposal of plunder, the staple product of his chief industry, and not the obtaining of commodities for a nation already deeming itself self-sufficient. The Germans' conception of international commercial relations was "that they may have traders to whom they may sell what they have taken in war, rather than that they desire anything whatever to be brought in to them" (iv. 2).

Ariovistus' list of things *verboten* to his people was long; among them were individual ownership of land and even the right to reside longer than a year in any desirable spot. From these primitive regulations his Junker descendants have widely departed, though the motives for them remain in all their pristine vigor: "That they may not exchange their love of warfare for agriculture," and again, "To keep the commons quiet" (vi. 22). These results are now secured in other ways. Thus even in Ariovistus' time the German government exalted the state and repressed the individual. As an instance, the entire tribe of the Harudes was assigned by Ariovistus to a section of Gaul selected by himself for them (i. 31), probably for reasons of state. To the crude military mind, then and now, the state and its policies are dominant, supreme. The material prosperity of the state is the *summum bonum*; and to this end all morals, public and private, are to be subordinated, all scruples set aside: "Robberies carry no reproach, provided they be committed outside their own territories" (vi. 23). How convenient for the replenishing of public treasury or private treasure, the art gallery or the jewel case! For art and jewels there must have been, even then, though the former may have consisted but of pictographs and the latter of pierced and polished shells or of irregular lumps of amber.

Even thus early in the race-history there existed a highly perfected organization of authority, and especially of military command. Ariovistus actually had a general staff for his army, which apparently differed from the similar body at the present time only in being chosen afresh for each war: "When the state enters upon a war, officers are chosen to direct this war and to hold powers of life and death" (vi. 23). And we may be certain that these primeval Hindenburgs and Ludendorffs gave short shrift to a Gallic man,

or even to a Gallic gentlewoman, who was suspected of constructive disloyalty or of lack of subserviency to the Teuton tyrant, or who might show a little mercy to captive soldiers of the Gallic race.

Ariovistus' methods of fighting and his art of war differed from those of the Gallic tribes both in tactics and in strategy. He had developed to a high degree of efficiency the theory of cavalry supports to a magnificently disciplined infantry (i. 48), as well as that of dismounted cavalry fighting as infantry (iv. 2). His strategy was a reflection of his personal craftiness. He regularly refused to come to fair and final decision in the open; and he won his ultimate victory over the forces of the Gauls only "after he had held himself many months in fortified camps and in the marshes and had not given them a chance at him" (i. 40); and attack on a nation whose army is disheartened and disintegrating brings easy victory; for he had dug himself in, as we should say today, and his somewhat unsophisticated enemies, with their different conceptions of valor and of military honor, fell into the trap and allowed their forces to become discouraged and partially to disband (i. 40). Strategic retreat also figured at that time in German strategy, as when two Germanic tribes forced a passage of the Rhine by deceiving the Menapii through a pretense of retreat. And it is to be noted that when their ruse had succeeded and the Menapii were in their power, "they maintained themselves during the rest of the winter on the supplies of these people" (iv. 4). The starving of resident populations by invading hordes of ruthless savages two thousand years ago set an unfortunate precedent.

Furthermore Ariovistus, as seems highly probable, maintained a more or less elaborate spy system in the midst of tribes and nations whose land he coveted or whose power he dreaded. Thus he was able to tell Caesar that he well knew that he, Caesar, had powerful enemies at Rome, to whom the great Proconsul's death would be welcome news (i. 44). It is hardly to be credited that all the initiative in this unsavory plot came from Caesar's enemies in Rome, or that it was their messengers alone who covered the weary miles of mountain and forest and marsh that lay between Rome and Ariovistus. The word usually translated "messengers" in (i. 44), must rather mean "messages," as it often does; for Romans could

scarcely have come through undetected, and few Gauls of the spy order could long keep a secret, owing to tribal jealousies and personal garrulity; their "unreliability" and "unsteadiness of character" earn many a sneer from Caesar. One is tempted to wonder who these original Boy-Eds and von Papens were, and what was their ostensible mission in the capital city of the world.

Coupled with this evidently efficient intelligence department there existed apparently a thoroughly unscrupulous corps of quasi-diplomats. Dilatory tactics, crafty counterproposals to the Roman demands, sheer time killing, movement of troops during a truce, the tempting of Roman officers from their allegiance—a game which Ariovistus, with singular fatuity, tried to play as a last resort with Caesar himself (i. 44)—all the weapons of a crooked diplomacy were employed with no mean skill, though no record has so far come to light of any request made to Ariovistus by one of his emissaries for fifty thousand Ariovistan thalers wherewith to corrupt the Roman senate.

The rules of diplomatic intercourse were, for Ariovistus, the rules of self-interest only. A solemn agreement of his own proposing was but "a scrap of paper." In the midst of a formal conference between the king himself and Caesar, to which the cunning barbarian had endeavored to prevent Caesar's bringing dependable troops, the German monarch resorted to the basest treachery, planned in advance. Ariovistus, well knowing the cowardice and unreliability of the Gallic cavalry, had demanded "that Caesar should bring no infantry to the conference; that both should come with cavalry" (i. 42). Caesar agreed but, seeing the trap, brought a detachment of his own famous Tenth Legion mounted on the horses of the Gallic cavalry contingent. We may imagine the chagrin of the German King when he saw the swarthy countenances of the Roman legionaries on their Gallic mounts. One might have supposed that, in the face of Caesar's evident suspicion, Ariovistus would have dissembled, in an attempt to convince the Proconsul that his suspicions were unfounded; but in the midst of the conference "it was reported to Caesar that the cavalry of Ariovistus were riding down upon our men and hurling stones and javelins at them" (i. 46). Yet this interview was held at Ariovistus' own

request and on his own conditions. "There is no international law," holds Ariovistus, as he not only violates a flag of truce and the sacred person of an ambassador, and violates them with premeditation, in the seizure of Procillus and Mettius, the latter an old acquaintance, but prepares to inflict fiendish torture on the envoys. They were saved only through the superstition of their unscrupulous captor (i. 47; i. 53), who three times had drawn lots to determine whether to burn them alive at once or to reserve for a future occasion his revenge for being outmaneuvered by Caesar at the conference. Each time, we are told, "they were safe by the favor of chance" (i. 53). Ariovistus and his minions were indeed grossly superstitious. Withered, witchlike crones read the secrets of the gods in weird incantations and made the outcome of their king's battle hang on the horns of the new moon (i. 50). And these German gods? They were conceived in the people's own likeness, creatures of the materialistic, utilitarian, and egoistic national mind. "In the number of the gods they consider only those beings which they can see, and by whose powers they are aided, such as the sun" (vi. 21). Ariovistus too sought his "place in the sun." All this superstition meant merely that adventure was deferred until these utilitarian gods should be believed to be in acquiescence with their worshippers. Progress has been made from this primitive concept by the reincarnate Ariovistus in the adoption of "Gott" as the permanent junior partner in the imperial directorate of the universe. "Breathing the diseased atmosphere of megalomania and blood lust," he has the name of God ever on his lips, and in the words of a recent essay, "To us, who are not on such easy terms with Heaven, the horror of the blasphemy is such that we must laugh, lest we go mad."

Ariovistus was an adroit propagandist. He had not only thoroughly defeated his Gallic neighbors, but he had them fully convinced of German invincibility. The German bogey was an obsession with them, and they passed the dreadful story on to Caesar's men with interest. "The Germans were of huge stature, of incredible valor and skill in arms" (i. 39). They shivered when they looked a German in the face, greatly of course to the delight of the German: "They declared that they could not even bear the

Germans' fierce expression and the glance of their eyes" (i. 39). The effect of these highly colored stories on the Roman soldiers affords a curious example of the contagion of fear. The propaganda almost proved successful; it would, in fact, have proved entirely so had not Caesar resorted to heroic counteractive measures. It is interesting to note in passing that as soon as the infection of the insidious propaganda was checked the Roman army marched splendidly on to final and complete victory. As an incidental means toward spreading his propaganda Ariovistus took pains to learn the languages of his enemies. He knew Celtic thoroughly (i. 47). He probably had a smattering of Latin as well; for while Caesar is usually careful to mention the presence of interpreters at interviews of state, no interpreter is mentioned for his important conference with Ariovistus. That Caesar knew no German is certain: he had never before been in contact with a Germanic race; and he did not even know Celtic (i. 19), a language with which Rome had been in contact for centuries.

Interesting indeed are the outward manifestations of Ariovistus' devious character, as seen in the negotiations leading up to the conference with Caesar and in the interview itself, as well as in the rather inexplicable attempt of the German King to entrap his astute enemy into another. Let us here remark parenthetically that efforts to settle vexing questions with regard to European boundaries by holding one "conference" after another have not been altogether unknown since the days of Ariovistus. This conference also failed of its purpose.

From the very first exchange of notes "Ariovistus himself, however, had put on such airs and assumed so arrogant an attitude that he seemed unendurable" (i. 33). The barbaric German King adopted the haughtiest of tones toward the great Roman, which the latter met with dignified firmness and with amused tolerance: "If he wanted anything from Caesar, to Caesar he would have come: so if Caesar wanted anything from him, to him Caesar should come. Besides, it seemed inexplicable to him what business Caesar or the Roman people at all had in his Gaul which he had conquered in war" (i. 34). For Ariovistus there could be "no peace without annexations"; and so insult after insult is offered in vain by the

representative of barbarism to the representative of the mightiest civilization of the ancient world. The entire thirty-sixth chapter of the first book of the *Commentaries* reads, *mutatis mutandis*, like a translation into Latin of certain well-known imperial utterances. The "good sword" glitters; the "mailed fist" swings; the Germans are "unconquerable" and will teach the presumptuous foreigner a lesson.

The interview itself is conducted on Ariovistus' side in the same vein of proud defiance. Its opening passages ring with the sound of a familiar falsehood. "I did not make war on the Gauls, but the Gauls on me" (i. 44) is the preposterous claim. Charges of bad faith are made and reiterated against Caesar: "I am bound to suspect that under a pretense of friendship you are maintaining the army which you have in Gaul for the purpose of attacking me" (i. 44). At times, however, Ariovistus employs skilful and valid argument, and there is some astute diplomacy, such as the proposed delimitation of separate spheres of influence, "This part of Gaul is my province, just as that is yours" (i. 44), a favorite device of the strong in partitioning the territory of the weak. But the German war lord's remarks consist chiefly of boastings and threatenings, and it is amusing to note the culminating threat of all: "Unless you retire and withdraw your army from these regions, I shall consider you not as a friend but as an enemy" (i. 44). It was the most terrifying thing which his overweening conceit could suggest to him. To defy that threat was indeed *lèse majesté*. We may readily imagine the Teuton shaking his fist under that Roman nose and exclaiming in bitter tones and with ferocious glance: "I shall stand no nonsense from Rome." With his own little world cringing before him in awe, he could not comprehend that strange, great republic beyond the Alps, which did not fear him. But the crowning bit of insulting folly lies in the closing words of the conference. They express a peace proposal on the basis of the *status quo ante* and the detachment of Rome from her allies, coupled with an offer of substantial favors to be granted if the terms are accepted. A bribe to Caesar! "But if you do leave and hand over to me the undisturbed possession of Gaul, I will reward you with substantial recompense" (i. 44). The magnificent diplomacy of Caesar's calm,

restrained reply does not concern us here. But we may note that the crossing of the paths of these two great figures of history resulted in strong confirmation of Solomon's observation, "pride goeth before destruction." May the application of that proverb be universal!

Such was Ariovistus, the type, persistent through the ages and now reincarnate. What has this type accomplished? It is highly probable that the Germanic peoples were originally serfs of the Celts. "And there was of old a time," says Caesar, quoting current legend, "when the Gauls surpassed the Germans in valor, carried on offensive wars against them, and sent colonies over the Rhine" (vi. 24). This strange story is strongly corroborated by the researches of D'Arbois de Jubainville, detailed in his work, *Premiers Habitants de l'Europe*. Caesar proceeds then to describe the gradual reversal of the positions and the slow decline of Celtic strength. War, ferocity, frightfulness seem thus to account for the steady advance of Germanic power from prehistoric days. Are these to be the dread means for the material progress of the nations? Is true civilization, the civilization of peace, then a failure? Is might really right?

It is for America to answer!